



## **Best Places to Live 2002**

By Diane Granat

### **MONTGOMERY COUNTY:Garrett Park**

#### *Small-Town Charms in the Shadow of Rockville Pike*

There are no mail carriers in Garrett Park. To get letters and packages, residents visit the town's tiny post office, where there's a good chance they'll run into a neighbor. It's something postmaster Veronica Sauvain sees over and over again.

"I've seen friendships develop among young mothers with little children," says Sauvain, who has lived in Garrett Park for 32 years and worked in the post office for 14. "They come down to get their mail, they start up a conversation, and the next thing you know, you see them coming down together, talking about play dates."

Garrett Park residents fought off home mail delivery in the 1950s, and residents have expressed their civic independence in other ways. The Montgomery County community, which has its own mayor and council, has amended its charter to allow non-US citizens to vote in town elections. To help preserve its stately trees, Garrett Park designated itself an arboretum in 1978.

Currently, the town is dealing with the "mansionization" trend—an issue in many older neighborhoods—in which small homes are being torn down and replaced by oversized houses.

**OFF THE BEATEN TRACK.** Garrett Park sits in the shadow of busy Rockville Pike, and it's a short walk to the Grosvenor Metro stop. Although Strathmore Avenue cuts through town, linking Rockville Pike and Connecticut Avenue in Kensington, Garrett Park maintains a serene nature.

A railroad track into town gave Garrett Park its beginnings in 1887. Today the train still plays a prominent role, with many residents catching MARC rush-hour trains to Union Station.

Next to the rail stop is Penn Place, the neighborhood hub that houses the post office, a small grocer, a real-estate office, a beauty salon, and the homey Garrett Park Café. In the summer and fall, there's an outdoor farmers market in the parking lot.

**HERE TO STAY.** Once people settle in the area, they tend to stay—though not always in the same house. "We've lived here since 1974 in three different houses, which is common in Garrett Park," says Nancy Dickson. "If you need more space you either add on or you try to find a bigger house in Garrett Park."

That longevity is evident in new census figures, which show one-third of the households reporting people over 65. The census also found that one-third of the households have children under 18, and Garrett Park is the kind of place where you see soccer flags hanging over doorways and license plates that read FAMILY 1. When it snows, the town closes Argyle Street for sledding.

For Garrett Park's seniors, there is a monthly potluck lunch at the Town Hall, a tradition that dates back more than 20 years. It's one of many activities sponsored by the Women's Club, including a Halloween pumpkin-carving contest, a holiday sing and visit by Santa in December, and a Valentine's Day bake sale to support a music scholarship for a student at Garrett Park Elementary School. The Women's Club reaches out to newcomers at an evening event each fall, and it maintains an emergency relief fund for residents facing financial problems

**THE HOUSES.** Much of Garrett Park's charm comes from the varied architecture of its 360 homes, a range from pristine Victorians to glassy contemporary homes. Mixed among the big houses are small Chevy houses, so-called because people who bought one of the two-bedroom cottages in the 1920s could get a Chevrolet car tossed in with the deal—plus an RCA radio and Murphy bed in the living room.

The two-bedroom Chevy cottages sold for around \$5,000 when they were built, and 32 years ago Veronica Sauvain and her husband bought one for \$18,500. Recently she heard that one of the houses—which had an addition—sold for \$370,000.

From that low, prices now go as high as \$800,000 for new homes and \$1.2 million for well-preserved Victorians with big yards, says real-estate broker Gene Kelley.

Climbing house prices have shaped the town's makeup. "There used to be quite a socioeconomic mix in town, but not anymore, because everything's gotten so expensive," Sauvain says.

**WHAT'S NEARBY.** Though Garrett Park has no shopping and restaurants other than the small cafe and grocer at Penn Place, it's a quick drive to White Flint and the bustle of Rockville Pike. Even closer is the Strathmore Hall Arts Center, which will become a major cultural spot when the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra begins concerts there in 2004. East of Garrett Park is Kensington, filled with antique shops. Residents also enjoy running or biking along Rock Creek Park's trails. Veronica Sauvain runs the Garrett Park Post Office. At right, one of the town's showpiece Victorian homes. Leisure pursuits in Garrett Park include monthly potluck lunches for

seniors and visits to the Arts Center at nearby Strathmore Hall. Penn Place, by the railroad tracks, is the town center, home to the post office and Garrett Park Cafe.

### **WHERE TO FIND IT**

To get to Garrett Park, take Strathmore Avenue east from Rockville Pike. Or from Connecticut Avenue in Kensington, go west on Knowles Avenue, which turns into Strathmore.

For more information, check [www.garrettpark-md.gov](http://www.garrettpark-md.gov).